

Chairman Arntzen and Members of the Committee,

I would like to tell you why it is critical that this bill provides funding for safety education for people using these pathways. Our state's growing shared use path network is a place for families to recreate and for children to walk and bike to school. Many of these pathways connect our neighborhoods to our schools and parks. The ability for our children to safely use these pathways to be healthy and active is critical. As you have heard from the sponsor and others, we need the funding to better maintain these pathways. We also need funding to provide the critical education our children need to safely navigate the places where these pathways cross streets.

Montana has a long tradition of providing the very best child pedestrian and bicycle safety education. In the mid-1970s, a child was hit and killed while walking to school in Missoula. Several key figures in Missoula decided to do something and began a program that is now called Journeys from Home Montana. This program is based in research into crash prevention and child development. The lessons were developed by a PE teacher and focus on guiding children as they develop safe behaviors around traffic. The lessons are developmentally appropriate beginning with Kindergarten and progressing through middle school and are incorporated into the physical education curriculum of the school.

The Office of Public Instruction Traffic Education program funded this program through the 1980s and early 90s. In communities across the state, they provided training for PE teachers and provided bicycles and equipment to facilitate implementation. In the 1990s the funding for Traffic Education changed and this vital education program lost its funding.

In 2005 the National Safe Routes to School program was formed and funded through the federal transportation bill. From 2010 through 2013 Montana DOT funded Journeys from Home with Safe Routes to School funds. Once again, teachers and schools across the state were receiving this critical resource as trainers worked across Montana from Trout Creek to Glendive and Dillon to Scobey. Additionally, MDT Safe Routes to School again funded trailers and equipment to implement the program in communities like Lewistown and Roundup. The Safe Routes to School program lost its funding in 2014.

This critical child safety education program is once again orphaned. This is why it is so important that you support passage of HB 604. We need a dedicated, consistent, state funding source for this education. We have heard from you MANY times during this legislative session that bicyclists need more education. We agree with you that there is a need for bicyclist education. This bill provides a simple and easy to implement funding source. Because you recognize the need to provide education for bicyclists and pedestrians and because you care about the safety of our children, I ask that you move HB 604 forward with a DO PASS.

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I served as the Safe Routes to School Coordinator for Montana from 2009-2013.